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‘Re-Imagining Difference: Musical Analysis, Alterity and the Creative Process’

Analysis, Cognition and Ethnomusicology:
Third International Conference on Analytical Approaches to World
Music (AAWM 2014)/Annual Conference of the British Forum for
Ethnomusicology (BFE 2014), July 2014

Laudan

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Alterity

‘By the turn of the 1990s, literary and social theory was laying heavy stress on the discursive logic through which dominant ideologies commonly route their power. We can call this the logic of alterity. It works by setting up oppositions between a normative unitary self, usually invested with universal significance, and a plurality of deviant or imperfect others. The others are defined by negation; they are everything the self is not, the mirrors in which the self recognizes its own identity. As we will see, this system of oppositionality is far from stable ... Furthermore, the identity that the self recognizes through the other is necessarily mystified ...’ (1995:34)

(from Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*, 1995, Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapter 2: ‘From the Other to the Abject. Music as a Cultural Trope’)

Alterity

[The argument of this chapter is that] ‘music has been closely tied to the logic of alterity since the mid-eighteenth century at the latest ... “Music” in this context refers not so much to an acoustic phenomenon as to an object constituted in representation. It is music as a cultural trope produced by music aesthetics, imaginative literature, and, reflexively, by musical composition’. (1995:35)

Alterity

‘... In its most persuasive and therefore most problematical forms, the logic of alterity invests the other with considerable allure and even with a measure of (usually arcane) power and truth. Yet the underlying hierarchical principle remains in force, and even gains in force, when the self gives the other some latitude to play seductively against the norm ... Self-other binaries gain in force when they admit ambiguities, hover or withdraw behind a variety of intermediate forms, show that certain terms count as self here and other there, substitute one opposition for another, mix the terms of parallel oppositions, and in general complicate or defer the recognition of their own role’. (1995:37)

Alterity

‘Not all dualities are automatically or consistently oppressive, nor are all historically oppressive dualities readily expendable as elements in art and thought. Nonetheless, binary thinking must clearly be understood as a historical, not just a conceptual, phenomenon, the consequences of which have too often been inhumane or worse’. (1995:38-9)

‘... we risk allying ourselves with the cultural agenda of domination whenever we embrace a duality, however abstract or depoliticized, that repeats the logic of alterity. The energies of valuation have high voltage; a duality is a treacherous instrument to ply’. (1995:41)

Alterity

‘both music and musicology [may] inventively undo the logic of alterity they are also historically fated to reproduce. What are the possibilities of opening out the categories of self and other so that they appear ... not as the first principles of a conceptual or political order, but as temporary limits in a dynamic, open-ended process’. (1995:49)

Setting the scene ...

bedāheh-navāzi (improvisation)

āhang-sāzi (composition)

Hierarchies of Knowledge

‘... begun to overpower what might be called ‘reasons of the ear’ to the extent that it no longer seems intellectually respectable, in musical circles, to adduce reasons of the ear against the claims of historical authenticity. In other words, now reasons of the ear, although they have not ceased to be relevant, have become relevant in only one direction. If you like the way authenticity sounds, that may be a reason in its favour; but if you don’t, or if you like something else better, that is, from the critical point of view, no reason at all’. (Kivy 1995:xi)

(from *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press).

Dualities of Knowledge

'... establish its own norms of scholarship and scientific enquiry (86) ...

Realizing the necessity to examine their own music on grounds free from the influence of western views, Iranian musicians are now challenging the intensive imposition of western musical thought upon their music and prolifically writing and helping the development of indigenous musicology and scholarship ...' (Movahed 2003:88)

(from 'Religious Supremacy, Anti-Imperialist Nationhood and Persian Musicology After the 1979 Revolution', *Asian Music* 35(1):85-113)

Dualities of Knowledge

‘western ethnomusicologists and Iranian musicologists trained in the west (107) ... unable to unfold the magnitude of layers necessary in the study of Persian music. Many indigenous musicians share a common concern that western methodologies are incompatible with eastern philosophical interpretations and ignore the sophisticated expressive dimensions entwined in Persian music’.

(Movahed 2003:107-8)

‘a combination of Western musicological and analytical study with Iranian musicology’.

(Mohammad Azadehfar 2006:8)

‘compatible with international principles [*montabeq bar osool-e beynolmelali*]’. (Zolfonoun 2001:24)

Dualities of Knowledge

‘How not to analyse African music? There is obviously no way not to analyse African music. Any and all ways are acceptable. An analysis that lacks value does not yet exist which is not to deny that, depending on the reasons for a particular adjudication, some approaches may prove more or less useful. We must therefore reject all ethnomusicological cautions about analysis because their aim is not to empower African scholars and musicians but to reinforce certain metropolitan privileges’. (Agawu 2003:180)

(from *Representing African Music. Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions*. Chapter 8: ‘How Not to Analyse African Music’. Routledge: New York and London)

Dualities of Knowledge

‘... anti-imperialist’ musicology based on ‘alternative concepts that deviate[d] from the western methodologies’. (Movahed 2003:85)

‘The idea that, beyond certain superficial modes of expression, European and African knowledge exist in separate radically different spheres originated in European thought, not in African thinking. It was (and continues to be) produced in European discourse and sold to Africans, a number of whom have bought it, just as they have internalized the colonizer’s image of themselves’. (Agawu 2003:180-1)

Phrase 1

Phrase 2

B³(ii)

(1)

motif (i)

(2) → (1)

(2) →

motif (i)

motif (ii)

B⁴(ii)

(1)

(2) → (1) (2) →

motif (iii)

motif (iv)

The image displays a musical score for the Gusheh zābol, a traditional Persian long-necked plucked lute. The score is written on four staves. The first staff is labeled 'Phrase 1' and the second 'Phrase 2'. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals. Specific motifs are labeled: 'motif (i)' appears on the first and second staves; 'motif (ii)' is on the third staff; 'motif (iii)' and 'motif (iv)' are on the fourth staff. Performance instructions like '(1)', '(2) →', and '(2) → (1)' are placed below the staves. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score concludes with a double bar line and a fermata.

Gusheh zābol – performed by Farhang Sharif, tār (long-necked plucked lute).
 Unpublished recording, c.1970



Strategies/principles

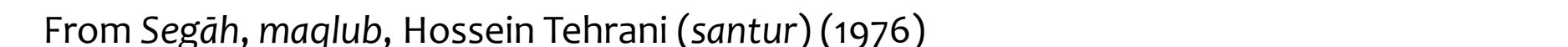
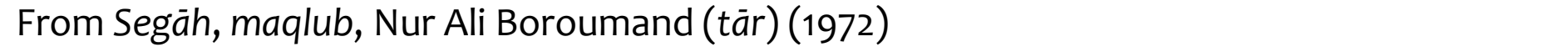
Different material developed in the same way



From *Māhur*, *darāmad*, Hossein Alizadeh (*tār*) (1986)



From *Segāh*, *darāmad*, Ahmad Ebadi (*setār*) (1970s)



Strategies/principles

‘... repeated use of abstract musical strategies [which] produce entirely different musical phrases’ (Alaghband-Zadeh 2012)

(from ‘Formulas and the Building Blocks of *ṭhumrī* Style: A Study in “Improvised” Music’, *Analytical Approaches to World Music Journal* 2(1):1-48).

‘Ahal School musicians seem to absorb “compositional principles” in the process of learning a pre-composed repertoire ... [and subsequently] apply these “principles” at appropriate moments in the inherited composition’. (Fossum 2010:180-1)

(from *The Ahal School: Turkmen Dutar and the Individual*. MA Thesis, Wesleyan University)

Hierarchies of Knowledge

‘... a construction of the historian, taking shape and gaining coherence from the reciprocal (and rich and haphazard) interaction of his evolving assumptions with his increasingly meaningful data, the events he selects for inclusion in the context [according to this view] there is no culture of Bali except for the anthropologists’ construal – his thick description – of it, so there is no culture of sixteenth-century Mantua apart from our interpretation ... As Collingwood put it, speaking only of history: ‘There *is* no past, except for a person involved in the historical mode of experience; and for him the past is what he carefully and critically thinks it to be.’ It is clear as well that the artifacts of culture exist for us only insofar as we perceive meaning in them in a cultural web. And this holds alike for Balinese shadow-plays, the puppets used in them, the poem that Monteverdi set to music, and Mozart’s G-minor Symphony’. (Tomlinson 1984:357)

(from ‘The Web of Culture. A Context for Musicology’, *19th-Century Music*, 7(3): 350-62)



Example of extended repetition, *gusheh zabol*, Jamshid Andalibi (*nei*)



FF

5

3

pā - - - ra kar pā -

GG (1) (2) (3) →

ra ?

pā - ra ra

pā - ra

pā - ra

HH

kar a a - ra -

II

-ja a - ra-ja su-no va a a - ra-ja ?

From a *khyāl* performance by Bhimsen Joshi in *rāg pūriyā dhanāśrī* and in *jhaptāl*
 (source: Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, *Ragas Puriya Dhanashree and Lalita Gauri*, Live at the
 I.C.A, London, Jul. 1985 (Navras NR0021 2 DDD, 1993)



ob. solo

p

(1) (2) (3) →

(1) (2) (3) →

(3) → 3 3 3

From the overture to *The Italian Girl in Algiers* (1813) by Gioachino Rossini



From the 3rd movement of the Piano Quintet in F, op.34 (1864) by Johannes Brahms

(1) (2) *var* (3) → (2) (3)



Creativity as an 'Icon of Difference'

'Modernity is thus not a purely Western or European project; on the contrary, it is constituted in and by the colonial encounter ... modernity can be seen as a discursive formation which has naturalized particular ways of thinking dependent on a series of familiar binaries: secular vs. sacred, content vs. form, rational vs. nonrational, mind vs. body, public vs. private, and, not least, tradition vs. modernity. Indeed, one of the most powerful ways in which the project of modernity operates is by defining itself as representative of rationality, progress, change, and universality, in opposition to "tradition", a category which comes to stand for all that is irrational or emotional, stagnant, ancient, and local (Bauman and Briggs 2003). Such oppositions gain currency, of course, by being mapped as the difference between the west and the non-west'. (Weidman 2006:6-7)

(from *Singing the Classical. Voicing the Modern. The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India*. Durham and London: Duke University Press)

Creativity as an 'Icon of Difference'

'... orchestrate the ways in which Western classical music and Indian classical music, defined by their mutual opposition, are allowed to meet (5) ... used to oppose Karnatic music to a generalized idea of Western music: whereas Western music is instrumental, Karnatic is vocal; whereas Western music is "technologically" superior, Karnatic is more "spiritual"; whereas Western music can be played just by looking at written music (or so the stereotype goes), Karnatic is passed on through *gurukulavsam*, a centuries-long oral tradition and a system of teaching that technology cannot duplicate'. (2006:246)

'... the vocal nature of Indian music and its ties to oral tradition – came to stand for [this] essential difference between South Indian classical music and western music'.

Creativity as an 'Icon of Difference'

[the *radif*] '... as an instrument of exclusion, one which legitimates and reinforces the identities and values of those who exercise cultural power' (Samson 2001:7)

(from 'Canon (iii)', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 2nd edn, Volume 5:6-7. London: Macmillan).

Re-Imagining Difference; Transcending Difference?

Amir Eslami (*nei*) and Hooshyar Khayam (piano)



Re-Imagining Difference; Transcending Difference?

‘shiveh-ye novin-e bedāheh-navāzi dar musiqi-ye Irani’ (‘a new approach to improvisation in Persian music’)

HK: ‘All these tracks are improvisations, but some are worked out improvisations and some are just raw improvisation, entirely from scratch from beginning to end. We even played in a dark room so as to focus entirely on the music. But others are not like that. They have been worked out. They are ideas that we discussed what we wanted to do. Nevertheless, we think of these as improvisational because of the ‘in the moment’ [*dar lahzeh*] development of ideas. But we think of them as a different kind of improvisation from traditional improvisation’. (interview 16.7.11)

Re-Imagining Difference; Transcending Difference?

‘*negāh-e āhāngsāzāneh*’ (‘a compositional view/approach’)

‘*tafakor-e āhangsāzi*’ (‘compositional thinking’)

HK: ‘We shape it structurally, we think about it. This is where it comes close to composition. They *are* compositions, we work them out. I think what we are doing has both qualities. We both have the experience of pure improvisation, but the common concept is that of structure’. (interview 26.11.10)

AE: ‘improvisation that is supported by compositional thinking’. (interview 26.11.10)

Re-Imagining Difference; Transcending Difference?

HK: Now, '*Khiāl*' is interesting. I went to my room one night and started playing on places of the piano which you normally wouldn't. I played all the harmonics, pizzicato, hitting on the iron and on the back of the instrument, on the body – well, I wouldn't say hitting because I was really caressing my instrument. And I was enjoying it. So, I gathered a large pile of sonic events and I put them into my computer. And then Amir came over. And he went to the room alone and played whatever he wanted. Of course, we had talked about the tonality, about what I was trying to get ...

LN: So, it was two completely separate events?

HK: Yes. And then Amir went home and I started my personal improvisation on these. I took the sonic events and started to build the work. I put on the drone which I had had in mind. And then I started to insert these events, upon each other, and modify them. So, the composition started to take shape. And then I called Amir again and we started to work on it together, and he played some more. And this is what '*Khiāl*' is. Now, when you listen to '*Khiāl*' you absolutely wouldn't guess how it's put together. (interview 16.7.11)



Re-Imagining Difference; Transcending Difference?

‘... appear ... not as the first principles of a conceptual or political order, but as temporary limits in a dynamic, open-ended process’. (Kramer 1995:49)

